

1890s, Tillman had declared that he “would lead a mob to lynch the negro who ravishes a white woman.”¹⁹ He expected the same response to Manly’s literary rape of the character of white women. At a rally in Fayetteville on October 20, 1898, Tillman questioned, “Why didn’t you kill that damn nigger editor who wrote that?” Tillman declared that white South Carolinians would not have permitted such an offense to go unpunished. Responding to Tillman’s pleas, a band of Red Shirts appeared shortly after his speech, marking the birth of the organization in North Carolina.²⁰

The Wilmington press sometimes identified the Red Shirts as the “Rough Riders.” One article described the Fifth Ward Rough Riders’ participation in a Democratic parade, “led by ‘Col. Teddy Roosevelt’ incognito Squire G.W. Bornemann.” The invocation of the name of the popular military unit and its commanding officer implied that this group of Wilmingtonians represented the same virtues of patriotism and manhood espoused in Cuba. Democratic campaign rallies undoubtedly featured local men who volunteered for service in the Spanish-American War in hopes of fulfilling the Confederate legacy of manly service. These men did not engage in the hostilities and therefore failed to prove their manhood. Tillman and his North Carolina counterparts challenged white North Carolinians to fulfill this legacy.²¹

When a white mob led by Alfred Moore Waddell burned the offices of the *Record* after Manly had fled the city, white Wilmingtonians achieved a degree of satisfaction. Stirred to action by Democratic rhetoric, white voters had restored white rule to Wilmington and destroyed a leading black voice in the city. Furthermore, Democrats successfully reinforced the “sexual power structure.” White men asserted their mastery by denying the African American male’s political independence and destroying the voice that publicized equal access to white and black women.²²

Manly inspired this act of violence, but blame cannot be so neatly placed upon his shoulders for the violence that ensued.²³ Manly’s editorial enraged whites of all classes, but the

¹⁹ Quoted in Williamson, *The Crucible of Race*, pg. 133.

²⁰ The Red Shirts facilitated the redemption of South Carolina in 1876. See Kantrowitz, *Ben Tillman*, chapter 2.

²¹ The *Messenger* reminded readers of the legacy of redemption left by their fathers: “Is the character of the good women of our state not as dear to us today as to our fathers? and do we not know that our fathers trampled under their feet the party that could bring such monstrous offenders as above?” *Wilmington Messenger*, August 24, 1898; Prather, *We Have Taken a City*, pg. 84; “Big Red Shirt Rally,” *Wilmington Dispatch*, November 3, 1898. Records fail to clearly distinguish between the “Red Shirts” and the “Rough Riders.” Newspaper accounts sometimes referred to the groups as separate organizations. For a discussion of the relationship between gender roles and the Spanish-American War, see Kristin L. Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998). One might argue that the Democrats’ rhetoric appealed to northern men, discouraging outside interference with the coup.

²² Kirshenbaum, “‘Vampire,’” pg. 28.

²³ Examples from black and white communities disagree with this assertion. An anonymous African American woman sent a letter to President McKinley, requesting assistance after the riot. She asked “why should a whole city full of negroes suffer for Manly when he was hundred[s] of miles away?” Quoted in Kirshenbaum, “‘Vampire,’” pg. 26. Late in life, H.E.C. “Red Buck” Bryant recalled that “[t]he outbreak there (Wilmington) was not caused by any political incident but a scurrilous item in the negro newspaper.” From clipping, n.d., Bryant Collection, State Archives, North Carolina. Agreeing with this sentiment, historian Joel Williamson writes, “In retrospect, it is incomprehensible that anyone as intelligent as Alex Manly could have lived in the midst of the Radical rage and been surprised by the consequences of his words. One is appalled by his lack of awareness, by the cavalier, almost careless manner in which he published his essay.” In Williamson, *The Crucible of Race*, pg. 198.